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May 2003



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Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club

May 2003

CLUB NEWS

NEXT MEETINGS

Wed May 14th, 7.30pm, Guest speaker is Don Hadden on "Bird Photography"
Don is living in Alice temporarily, is a bird-watcher and a photographer of some note. OLSH staffroom

Wed June 11th, 7.30pm: Don Langford on History of the National Mala Project. OLSH staffroom

TRIPS

Sun 11th May, 4WD trip through Lawrence Gorge, Owen Springs. Meet at 7.0am at Flynn's grave parking area. (Note: not May 5th as in previous newsletter)

Sat May 31st, Ormiston Gorge, Mound Springs. Meet at 7.30am at Flynn's grave parking area. Either camp at 2 Mile (near Glen Helen) overnight or return to Alice Springs.

Sun June 15th, N'Dhala Gorge

Sun Jun 22nd, Waterwatch with Rosalie Breen ... to be confirmed

For further information on any of the above, contact Bob Read 8952 1935.

KINDRED ORGANISATIONS' ACTIVITIES & EVENTS

Please confirm details with the organisations listed.

Dates	Activities	Venues / Contacts
Wed. May 7, 7.30pm	Aust. Plants Soc. (APS) monthly meeting: Dr Tony Bowland, Dir. Natural Systems (DIPE) on "Ongoing monitoring of the Waddywood <i>acacia peuce</i> ." (This is one of the rarest & most striking trees of the Australian arid zone & found only in three places.) Followed by supper & plant identification	at Botanic Gardens Ph. 8952 5229

Insurance

You will note in the minutes that the committee resolved to take out Public Liability Insurance, and this has been acted on. I sympathise with the view that insurance is an expensive nuisance, but unfortunately it cannot be dismissed that easily. All other incorporated groups I canvassed considered it advisable to carry insurance.

Incorporation does not protect the officers of a club if guilty of a "reckless act". These are not well defined, but there is a strong opinion that failure to carry Public Liability Insurance could be ruled to be a "reckless act". In the event of a liability suit against the club, the judge might rule that the club's officers could be sued. The cost of defending such a claim would be substantial, the consequence of losing one could be bankruptcy.

Despite the much-publicised reforms to laws on liability, in a recent case, there was a settlement of \$10 000 for a sprained ankle.

The implications of our decision to carry Public Liability Insurance are serious.

This year we can cover the cost thanks to the very generous donation of \$200 from the NTFNC in Darwin, and using our own reserves. By next year we will have to take one of the following options:

1. Increase our income, probably by increasing fees.
2. Seek affiliation or amalgamation with some other organisation to spread the cost.
3. Dis-incorporate.

I do not think that 1 is a good idea, as I would like to avoid a large increase in fees or fund raising. Our fees have always been low so that the cost is not a deterrent to membership, and I would not like to see this changed. A large increase could cause a downward spiral in membership.

Option 2 seems to me to be the most logical and attractive. If we amalgamated with the NT Field Naturalists Club, the insurance cost would still be \$300 spread over about 100 members. As stated by the NTFNC committee any such amalgamation would need to "be carefully considered and negotiated over a period of time". I realise that there is a certain amount of suspicion of anything to do with Darwin among our membership. I believe that this is misplaced. Note the magnanimous offer to assist with our insurance costs with no strings attached. I do not see any future committee interfering unduly in Alice Springs affairs. Believe me that it is enough of a problem getting one's own program organised without worrying about some one else's.

There could be other options for affiliation, but possibilities that I have investigated to date do not seem ideal. The final option of dis-incorporation will be what we are left with if we cannot manage one of the others. The pros and cons of this are too long for one newsletter.

Robert Read, President

We're not the only ones that have faced the insurance issue ! Here's an item from one their previous year's newsletter of the Outback Field Naturalists in South Australia, posted on their website.

"A year has passed since our affiliation with the Field Naturalists Society of South Australia. This has been a great move and so far no problems or complaints."

Dragonflies

There were so many dragonflies at Anna Reservoir the other weekend, that it sparked my interest to find out a bit more.

"The dragonflies is an insect, that has more than 4500 different types of shapes and colours, of its kind.

The Dragonflies life cycle:

After mating has occurred the female would either lay her eggs in stems under the water, scatter in the mud under the water, or just under the top of the water, depending on what type of dragonfly it is.

Dragonflies are carnivorous. The dragonfly nymph has no wings but it breaths through gills which are concealed within its rectum. When the dragonfly nymph is ready to change it climbs out of the water a being to turn in to an adult dragonfly.

At first, the skin cracks open, like a cicada, and then it dries off in the sun to create it's bright colours. The dragon can fly up to 56 kilometres per hour. Sadly the dragonfly only lasts about a month out of the water."

This information comes from the book called 'Insects and Spiders' By Picturepedia and a book called Dragonflies by Oxford Scientific Films & was posted on the following website

And did you know ... ?

that the 3rd Worldwide Dragonfly Association (WDA) International Symposium of Odonatology was held in the historic town of Beechworth, Victoria, in January this year.

Birding in Tasmania

King Penguins & Dusky Grasswrens. You are unlikely to mention these two species in the same breath if you are an Alice Springs resident. However, three weeks ago I was watching a king Penguin & last week I saw a Dusky Grasswren near Anna Reservoir.

The King Penguin was on a beach near Port Arthur in southern Tasmania. As it was well into the moult, it was unable to venture into the water but it stood unconcerned, surrounded by masses of feathers as tourists and bird watchers came to see it.

My wife & I have just arrived in Alice Springs having spent the last three months in Tasmania. It's a great place for birding, the scenery reminiscent of our home in New Zealand but you really need to be there between November & March unless you're into skiing.

Tasmania has 12 endemic birds & all can be seen close to Hobart. The best place to start is the Peter Murrell Reserve at Coffee Creek near Kingston. This was a favourite haunt of mine & I was able to obtain photographs of the following endemics:

- Stong-billed Honeyeater
- Black-headed Honeyeater
- Forty-spotted Pardalote
- Yellow-throated Honeyeater
- Yellow Wattlebird
- Black Currawong
- Dusky Robin
- Green Rosella
- Tasmanian Native-hen

That takes care of nine of the 12. The other three can be seen at Mt Wellington. Travel to the Fern tree settlement & along the walking tracks behind the church you will see Tasmanian Scrubwren, Tasmanian Thornbill & the Scrubtit. I've heard the Scrubwren may be demoted to a sub-species only, but I had the good fortune with my effort to photograph it. It is a shy, skulking species, fossicking in the darker parts of the undergrowth & no matter how quietly & slowly you stalk a family party, it always seems to have a tangle of twigs between itself & your lens. One day though, where a patch of sun illuminated a scrubby

tangle of vegetation, a Scrubwren hopped out into the full sun where it spread its wings & fluffed out its feathers enjoying a few minutes of sunbathing. It took no notice of my presence just two metres distance, enabling me to obtain a series of goof photographs.

On another occasion, I saw one disappear under a dead tree fern frond lying on the ground. I soon realised it has a nest there & from a distance I saw it busily taking grubs to the chicks. The nest was less than a metre from a popular walking track. Often a dog would accompany people walking the track but the nest remained undiscovered & the chicks fledged successfully.

If you've ever visited Tasmania, you will surely have seen the historic penal settlement at Port Arthur. Even while doing the touristy thing, a bird photographer is always alert to what is going on. Near the punishment cell I noticed a Striated Pardalote on the prison wall. It was carrying food. Despite the steady stream of tourists, I soon discovered it was flying into the open door of the cell block & there in a niche in the passageway, it had built a nest. Several times the Pardalote thought the coast was clear, flew into the doorway just as a tourist walked out. Several times I heard "that b.... bird just about flew into my face!" Amazingly, just four or five metres from the Pardalote's nest the endemic Green Rosella had taken over a hole in another wall & both adults were visiting the nest, somewhat more circumspectly than the Pardalotes, but nevertheless with sufficient confidence allowing me to get several photographs.

Enough rambling on. My wife & I are now looking forward to our three months in Alice Springs. Already we have found people amazingly helpful & kind.

Don Hadden

Don & Llana Hadden are New Zealanders who have recently spent three years as volunteers on Bougainville Island. They are now travelling throughout Australia. Llana is a nurse at the Alice Springs Hospital & Don is a retired school teacher now pursuing his hobby of bird & nature photography full-time.
